

growing up

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If there was one thing Stan hated more than anything, it was dinner with his family. Not just his mom or dad, no- with his grandparents was the worst.

They never seemed to shut up, was the thing. They could talk and talk and talk, sometimes in Russian, mostly in English... and it was all about nothing. Which was what Stan usually hated; their talk was boring, it meant nothing to him.

Well, usually.

“Well, I’ve gotta say,” Benjamin Uris said, leaning back in his chair and relaxing. “Stanley, you sure are growing up fast.”

The other senior, Heidi Uris, smiled at her grandson as well, who was at this point looking slightly uncomfortable. “And so short, too, where does that come from? None of us are so small!”

Stan pointed innocuously at his grandfather, who was, in fact, also under five foot ten, abstaining from talking so that he might nip this conversation in the bud. Stan hated talking about his appearance with his family. Hated, hated, hated it. It was always the same conversation and comments, the ones that made Stan’s skin crawl and his nerves go into overdrive so he could feel every little thing about his body- the way his stomach was pushing slightly against his high-waisted pants, the way they were also digging into his hips, the way his stray hairs were frizzing around his face in his peripheral. He wanted to cry already, and nothing had even happened.

“Well, Stanley, that’s true...” Andrea cut in, and Stan felt his entire body stiffen. His mother never was the same around her in-laws. “But I think the real question is how you’re so short and skinny, yes?”

“Oh, definitely,” Heidi agreed. “He is so small and thin, is that your family, Andrea?” Stan nearly closed his eyes and prayed for this to end. He was so done with this conversation, so over this entire thing of ‘oh, Stanley is such a thin boy, do you feed him?’ and the ‘he was such a chubby baby, we’re surprised he turned out this way!’

That was another thing he hated- the bomb his family had dropped last Hannukah that yes, Stan had been a chubby baby. ‘We thought for certain you would be a fat boy, Stanley, how untrue that was! You’re still skin and bone!’ His grandmother had said. Stan had just nodded and gritted his teeth, trying to ignore all the thoughts suddenly swimming in his head. He had felt his heart rate pick up at that comment, at the thought he could have been fat. Not that fat was bad on everyone, no, of course not, Stan just hated the idea.

“No, it’s not. We’re all pretty short and squat over in Italy!” Andrea tipped her head back and laughed, unknowingly pushing her son back into his seat.

Benjamin shrugged, taking a sip of wine and saying, “well, I suppose genetics will take care of that for him, then, since it’s the same in Russia.”

“Oh, yes. Be ready, Stanley!”

Stan simply smiled tightly and looked down at his clasped hands, and the four adults laughed together before completely forgetting about the topic and going on to the next round of family gossip.

Stan’s heart was absolutely racing at that point. Genetics will take care of it? What does that mean? Be ready?

Stan knew what they were joking about of course; skinny little Stanley was going to get fat someday. Stan shivered at the thought of it- at the thought of his hips and stomach and legs and neck thickening as he got older, his stomach pressing against his jeans until he needed the next size, and the next. His jawline falling away and his cheekbones filling out into chubby cheeks, his thin fingers becoming bigger, his tiny wrists disappearing. And not quickly, either, no, it must happen slowly. Over years and years and years, creeping up on him, until someday he’d see one of his old friends (Richie, it would most likely be Richie) would see him and they’d say ‘Hey, it’s Stan The Man Uris! Wow, good to see you! Gee, you’ve sure changed, huh? Been relaxing, enjoying life a little, huh? I can tell.’ And their eyes would trail up and down and they’d take in everything, the swell of his stomach, his thighs and his widened hips, his rounded face and his soft body. And they’d see how much he’d let

himself go and they'd go home and they'd laugh, they'd laugh at poor Stan Uris for how he'd grown up.

Everything he worked for so, so hard for his whole life, gone. Because he was meant to become that way. To become unremarkable, to become ugly, to become fat.

Just thinking about it brought poor Stan almost to tears.

"Hey, mom?"

Andrea smiled at her son. "Yes, Stanley?"

Stan coughed, pushing his plate away and saying, "uh, may I be excused? Please?"

Andrea blinked, confused slightly at the boy's desperate tone. "Of course, Stanley. I'll come up later."

Stan nodded, saying his goodbyes to Grandma and Grandpa Uris before rushing upstairs and curling up onto his bed as soon as he could, clicking the door shut behind him.

To Stanley Uris, dinner with the grandparents really was the worst.